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ABSTRACT

The National Institute of Education (NIE) had commissioned an evaluation project of certain postsecondary programs for nontraditional students that would involve decision makers in the core of the design activity. This report discusses the conflict that emerged between NIE and the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education (CRDHE) and the failure of their efforts to resolve the conflict. The terms of the initial agreement did not establish a clear priority between the design of an evaluation and the necessity of consultation with decision makers. Nor were the steps spelled out in operational terms. The center's intellectual interests and their ties inclined them to questions of direct interest to program managers. NIE, however, was primarily interested in serving federal decision makers' assessment as to how well specific groups were being served. The existence of this fundamental divergence did not become evident until it was too late to change the project. Furthermore, there was a clash of styles. CRDHE was accustomed to a collegiate style and relied little on hierarchical lines of authority. (Author/CTM)

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SEPARATE REALITIES:
A CASE STUDY OF DISAGREEMENT IN THE DESIGN OF AN EVALUATION

June 15, 1977

National Institute of Education
Contract No. 400-76-0144
First Task Final Report

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INTRODUCTION

In the past decade the number of evaluations performed for American government agencies has grown enormously. In the wake of these reports there has also been a growing literature on how to conduct evaluations in general and on how specific evaluations were conducted. This report is somewhat out of step with this tradition because we shall describe an evaluation that didn't happen even though significant time and money was expended in an attempt to design it.

The basis for our story is contract #400-76-0107 between the National Institute of Education (NIE),* and agency within the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare, and the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education CRDHE),* at the University of California, Berkeley. Under the terms of this contract CRDHE perceived its obligation to be one of designing selected "nontraditional" programs in American higher education. However, there was an interesting and unusual twist to this perceived task. CRDHE was to design the evaluation in consultation with decisionmakers in the hope that such consultation, early in the design phase of the evaluation, would promote the utilization of the results of the evaluation by decisionmakers.

This latter feature of the NIE-CRDHE contract was of particular interest in NIE. NIE officials were dismayed by their sense that previous social science evaluations, often performed at the expense of the federal government, appeared to have had little impact upon those

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* Throughout this report, NIE and CRDHE will each be considered as having a clear and singular perception of the events. The use of this simplification obscures the range of perceptions which existed within each agency.

officials who have the power to expand, terminate or redirect social and educational programs. In 1975 NIE had asked TEAM Associates, a Washington, D.C. consulting firm, to assess the reasons for such non-utilization of evaluative studies. One of TEAM's major conclusions was that decisionmakers find most evaluations to be of little interest because such studies are not tailored to produce information that answers the questions that decisionmakers have. Hence, one strategy to improve the utilization of evaluation is to insure that the decisionmaker's questions are taken into account at the very start of evaluation planning.

Moreover, NIE had an immediate substantive focus for evaluation. Because of its support of the University of Mid-America, NIE was interested in UMA's impact in serving the nontraditional student as compared with the impact of other postsecondary programs attempting to serve the same student groups. Some of these programs used novel means of teaching students; or experimented with flexible class scheduling; or were teaching students at locations outside of the conventional college campus.

Thus, the Institute began to move toward the commissioning of an evaluation project that would attend to the impacts of certain postsecondary education programs upon "non-traditional" students, but in a fashion that would involve decisionmakers in the core of the design activity.

NIE was drawn to contact CRDHE, in large part because of the Center's previous work in evaluating nontraditional programs.[1] There was considerable overlap between the programs included in the Medsker study and in the TEAM Associates study, lending credence to NIE's belief in the feasibility of building on the Medsker data. A new effort by CRDHE, adding to the existing data base, could move a second study toward a

longitudinal analysis of nontraditional program effects. In mid-1976 NIE drafted a tentative outline of a research proposal and requested CRDHE's reaction. NIE then revised its proposal and asked CRDHE to respond on a sole-source basis. CRDHE submitted a proposal in response to the Institute's request. The effective date of the contract was August 17, 1976.

The Institute had also been in contact with the Evaluation Consortium at Stanford University. The Consortium, a group of faculty members and students in various Stanford departments, was keenly interested in the political and social ramifications of evaluation. After an exchange of letters and a visit, NIE asked the Consortium to propose work on two tasks. Under the first task, the Consortium was to document the CRDHE's efforts under a nine month evaluation design contract, with special attention to the Center's experience in involving decisionmakers in their work. Under the second task, the Consortium was to design a study that would permit NIE to assess the impact of the Center's evaluation of nontraditional programs upon decisionmakers if in fact, NIE decided to support the initiation of an evaluation in the following year. The Consortium responded, with some modification proposed for the second task. The Consortium's response was accepted and the contract became effective as of September 17, 1976. Thus, the Consortium became the "third party" evaluator for the design work already begun at CRDHE. This report deals with the first of the tasks specified in our contract with the Institute.

In working on the first task we have relied heavily upon several strategies in attempting to collect data in a relatively unobtrustive way:

(1) A member of the Consortium staff attended working meetings of the CRDHE staff including meetings involving the National Advisory Panel

formed by the Center and NIE staff.

(2) Copies of CRDHE working papers and weekly logs of activity were collected.

(3) Interviews were conducted with CRDHE staff.

Initially, our primary efforts were directed toward understanding the Center's efforts to involve a decision making audience in their work. However, in December, 1976, it became obvious that the Center and NIE were in serious disagreement over the purpose and structure of the proposed evaluation design activity. Our focus shifted more and more to an examination of the erosion of the CRDHE-NIE partnership and, after a substantial revision of the Center's contractual obligations in February, 1977, to a post-mortem on the original project's demise.

This report is keyed to four major questions:

(1) What were the beginning steps in CRDHE's conceptualization of the decision making audiences in postsecondary education, and what were the anticipated effects on the design of the evaluation?

(2) Which of these potential decision making audiences were anticipated as being included or excluded in CRDHE's design activities? What factors were influencing these decision?

(3) On what issues did CRDHE and the Institute staff agree or disagree with special attention to the areas of: (a) purpose of the evaluation, (b) proposed methodology and anticipated methodological rigor, (c) criteria of success of an evaluation? What attempts were made to reconcile these tensions, what was the effect of these attempts?

(4) How did the interaction of CRDHE, the Institute, the National Advisory Panel to CRDHE, and the "third party" evaluator affect the attempted design of the evaluation?

As we reviewed our data and prepared our analysis, it became evident that responses to the first three questions would be heavily intertwined. The fourth question would be most conveniently discussed separately. The body of the report consists of five sections. In the first, we present an overview and analysis of events in response to the first three questions. The second is a chronology detailing CRDHE and NIE activities, and providing background and documentation for the preceeding analysis. The third section contains an overview and analysis in response to the fourth question, and the fourth section provides the documenting chronology for this analysis.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report analyzes the brief history of a contract let by the National Institute of Education (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare) to the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education (CRDHE) at the University of California, Berkeley, Under this contract, CRDHE was to:

(1) Design an evaluation of the effectiveness of selected postsecondary programs in American higher education and

(2) Conduct the design process in consultation with a group of "decisionmakers" interested in such programs.

The latter feature of the contract arose from the Institute's interest in stimulating the use of evaluation in educational policy making and earlier consultative work conducted for NIE by TEAM Associates who had contended that utilization of evaluation would be increased if decisionmakers became actively involved in the early stages of evaluation design.

NIE also let a contract to the Stanford Evaluation Consortium to:

(1) Document CRDHE's experience in working with decision making groups and

(2) Advise the Institute on the design of a possible future study that, in the event NIE proceeded with the evaluation designed by CRDHE, would assess the impact of the evaluation of non-traditional programs upon decisions making processes affecting those programs.

CRDHE began their design work in August, 1976; formed a National Advisory Panel (NAP) to assist them; and subsequently submitted an interim

progress report to NIE in December, 1976. As part of their Interim Report, the Center proposed a typology of programs in non-traditional higher education; suggested specific programs to be involved in the design phase; and requested NIE approval to commence field work. NIE rejected the Interim Report and the concepts underlying the study strategy it embodied. Subsequent efforts by both groups failed to resolve the conceptual impasse. The attempt to create a comprehensive evaluation design was aborted in January, 1977. The balance of CRDHE's contract efforts were redirected into three "mini-projects" that represented pieces of the original comprehensive design effort.

As a result this report, originally intended to present CRDHE's initial experiences with involving decisionmakers in an evaluation design project, has evolved into a description and analysis of the conflict that emerged between NIE and CRDHE and the failure of efforts to resolve the conflict.

The terms of the initial agreement between NIE and CRDHE did not establish a clear priority between the two major emphases of the project: (1) Design of an evaluation and (2) Consultation with decisionmakers. Nor were the steps required to meet either focus spelled out in operational terms. Efforts to meet both purposes could not proceed independently. Either a decision making audience had to be delineated, and their concerns made the core questions for study, or major evaluative questions had to be identified by CRDHE and subsequent efforts made to identify decisionmakers interested in CRDHE's questions. CRDHE chose the latter course of action.

In retrospect, the Center's action was not surprising. CRDHE staff responsible for this contract included researchers with considerable

interest and experience in studying nontraditional education. The NIE contract provided an opportunity for CRDHE to more clearly define the major instructional and student support components inherent in nontraditional education and to study the effectiveness of such components in meeting identified student needs. Further, CRDHE had well established ties among designers and managers of nontraditional programs. Thus, both the Center's intellectual interests and their ties to the nontraditional community inclined them to begin by posing questions that would be of direct interest to program managers.

NIE had other interests. The Institute was primarily interested in serving federal decisionmakers whose prime interests were assumed to be a current assessment as to how well specific groups, such as minorities, woman, the retired and the poor were being served by postsecondary education.

Thus, CRDHE wanted to study nontraditional education with an eye toward program level decisions regarding service delivery whereas NIE was interested in an analysis of the effectiveness of postsecondary programs in aiding student groups delineated along demographic lines.* Lying behind these differences was the reality that each institution had in mind different audiences for the project's work.

The existence of this fundamental divergence in perspective did not become evident until the CRDHE filed its November interim report. Once the interim report was filed it became evident that the phrase

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* The phrase "demographic characteristics" is used throughout this report to refer to any statistic, either general or specific, used to describe population sub-groups.

"an evaluation of postsecondary programs serving nontraditional student populations" had created widely different images at NIE and CRDHE. The delay in discovering the conflict can be attributed to several factors:

(1) The initial contract documents were vague with respect to the specific purposes to be accomplished and the specific decisions to be facilitated.

(2) The NIE staff members who initiated contact with CRDHE did not continue an active role in the project.

(3) The internal dynamics of the CRDHE staff militated against vigorously pressing NIE for early clarification of differing perspectives:

(a) The original CRDHE staff group of three members was expanded to six. Developing new working relationships within the expanded group did not aid early conceptual clarity. The physical transfer of CRDHE offices also caused disruption of communication patterns.

(b) Only one of the six CRDHE staff members was assigned full time to the NIE project. Thus, problems inherent in the division of labor were complicated by conflicting time commitments.

(c) The National Advisory Panel reflected interests and backgrounds quite compatible with CRDHE. Thus, possible alternative perspectives on the task to be done were not illuminated by the NAP.

While each of the foregoing factors was significant, the initial ambiguity surrounding the term "populations" and the failure to specify the primacy of either the "evaluation" question or the "decisionmaker"

question probably was most responsible for the subsequent difficulties.

Once the conflict between CRDHE and NIE became manifest, additional difficulties blocked efforts at resolution. First, only six months remained in the CRDHE design contract and it was most doubtful that a significant redirection that also met the aspiration of a comprehensive evaluation design could be achieved in the remaining time. Furthermore, there was a clash of styles. CRDHE was accustomed to a collegial style of decision making that gave a wide berth to "experts" and relied little on hierarchical lines of authority. On the other hand, NIE as the agency bearing the cost of the contract, deemed it legitimate to expect CRDHE to adapt to the Institute's preferences. For CRDHE the financial incentives offered by the contract were not sufficient to cause them to pursue a design emphasis, based upon a demographic categorization of non-traditional students, that they deemed to be profesionally unjustifiable.

There is little need or value in attempting to determine whether NIE or CRDHE should be saddled with the responsibility for the emergence of the basic conflict. Each group used identical words and phrases to describe its unique image of the project. Only after CRDHE's image of the project clearly emerged in the interim report was it possible for NIE to recognize that its image was different. Neither group used all of the possible means of communication to calm its sense of uneasiness about the direction of the project. Neither group understood the external and internal pressures operating on the other group. The conflict, once discovered, could not be resolved.

OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONS 1, 2, and 3

(1) What were the beginning steps in CRDHE's conceptualization of decisionmaking audiences in postsecondary education, and what were the anticipated effects on the design of the evaluation?

(2) Which of these potential decisionmaking audiences were anticipated as being included or excluded in CRDHE's design activities? What factors were influencing these decisions?

(3) On what issues did CRDHE and the Institute staff agree or disagree, with special attention to the areas of: (a) purpose of the evaluation, (b) proposed methodology and anticipated methodological rigor, and (c) criteria of success of an evaluation. What attempts were made to reconcile these tensions and what were the effects of these attempts?

The contract between NIE and CRDHE called for two efforts: (1) the design of an evaluation of selected programs in non-traditional postsecondary education, and (2) a test of the hypothesis that if decisionmakers are incorporated in the planning of an evaluation, then utilization of the evaluation findings will be increased. Neither of the documents which led to the letting of this contract (NIE's RFP and CRDHE's proposal), clearly specified which focus (utility of evaluation or evaluation of service to nontraditional populations) was to dominate the project nor what specific information an appropriate evaluation would produce nor which groups or individuals were the relevant decisionmakers in the area of postsecondary education for nontraditional students. In retrospect, it appears that this lack of specificity made the simultaneous accomplishment of the two missions impossible. A fair test of the hypothesis that the involvement of decisionmakers in the planning of an evaluation will increase the utilization of the evaluation findings appears to require that decisionmakers assist from the outset defining and formulating questions to be the subject of the evaluation. But this is impossible without an initial understanding

of who the relevant decisionmakers are. A specification of a set of important questions in the area of nontraditional education, (essentially defining the information desired), might have served to identify a group of decisionmakers with an interest in those questions, but such an early specification of questions would have limited the decisionmakers' role in assisting in the planning of the evaluation, weakening the test of the hypothesis. In the absence of either an initial specification of the relevant decisionmakers or the appropriate set of questions to be addressed by the evaluation, a choice of defining one dimension would have to be made, and would in turn affect the definition of the other dimension.

Why was this logical puzzle not apparent to NIE or CRDHE during the earliest stages of the project? To some extent the proverb that the vision of hindsight is "twenty-twenty" applies. But we believe that the explanation is in part more subtle than the proverb implies. Although the actual language of the contract documents fails to specify the population of decisionmakers and the set of questions to be the subject of the evaluation, both the staff of NIE and of CRDHE were predisposed to attribute particular interpretations to the language when forced by project tasks to produce what each group considered to be sensible specifications. Thus, we suspect that both NIE and CRDHE entered into the contract with latent, albeit vague preferences concerning these questions.

The preferences of each institution were based upon the experiences of each and the audience each perceived as of primary importance for their work. Preferences were different for each institution, but the inherent conflict between them did not surface until the dialogue which followed

NIE's rejection of the Center's Interim Report. We will support this explanation through an analysis of CRDHE and NIE actions, actions which we believe conform to and are manifestations of each institution's predisposition to interpret "decisionmakers" and "appropriate evaluative questions" in different and conflicting ways.

The CRDHE Perspective:

CRDHE initially avoided narrowing the domain of decisionmakers in the area of nontraditional education. Their first broad concept included any person, institutional body, or agency, from the program level to the national level, that had a conceivable interest in nontraditional education. An attempt to provide some structure to this decisionmaker universe resulted in a matrix with 136 cells, although the matrix was immediately recognized as too unwieldy to be useful. While there was some discussion on the limitations of such a complex system of categories, substantial revision was postponed while awaiting the advice of the National Advisory Panel (NAP).

In preparation for the NAP meeting, the broadly defined concept of decisionmakers began to be narrowed in what may have seemed to be a minor way. The narrowing was perhaps a result of concern that the NAP would be unable to make its full potential contribution to the development of the Center's approach without a more specific definition to work with. Although it may have then seemed to be a minor narrowing of the definition of "decisionmakers", the kind of concept shaping which occurred at this point is indicative of the kind of definition with which CRDHE was comfortable. In their language, "It was agreed that decisionmaker roles would be defined in terms of their impact on the

ability of nontraditional programs to deliver educational services."[1]

The Center's choice to link the definition of "decisionmakers" to their "Impact on the delivery of services" reveals a predisposition to focus on the "delivery end" of the system of organizational and individual activity which results in the provision of nontraditional services. Also, a focus on the "delivery end" necessarily identifies certain decisionmakers far more easily and readily than others. These more easily identified individuals are those who have sufficiently clear and direct campus level influences upon programs of non-traditional education, that their decisionmaking roles are defined in terms of their influence. For example, the program managers or the administrators of the institutions within which the programs exist have a clear and direct role in shaping the program. They would tend to be identified by the Center's definitional scheme quite easily. In contrast, the individuals whose influence is diffused by their organizational or geographical distance from the "delivery end" would have roles much more difficult to define in terms of influence on the programs. Officials at the state or federal level whose activities influence attitudes about the legitimacy of nontraditional education have important but subtle influences, and would tend to be relatively difficult to identify through use of the Center's definitional scheme. The result of this approach would almost certainly have been an emphasis on campus level decisionmakers and a de-emphasis on those farther removed from service delivery.

This is not intended as a criticism of the Center's procedures in this regard. The direction that CRDHE took, not only in their narrowing of the definition of decisionmaker but also in selecting the decisionmakers to comprise their advisory panel conforms to the program-focused orientation

of their prior work, the kinds of nontraditional educational personnel with whom they were in contact, the methodologies which previously had brought them recognition in their field, and their point of view that focus on campus level programs would increase the probability that learners would be the ultimate beneficiaries of their work. (The composition of the NAP, for example, was weighted with individuals committed to nontraditional education).

It would have been surprising, in retrospect, if CRDHE had acted in a different manner than they chose. They presumably believed that NIE approached them because they had a special expertise in the area of nontraditional education, an expertise which resulted, in part, from the talents and abilities the staff had developed in work they had previously done. It would have been natural for the Center staff to think that if NIE had wanted a non-program level focus, a focus that would probably have required different kinds of abilities than Center staff brought to the contract tasks, NIE would not have contacted them initially.

It would have also been surprising, in retrospect, if the Center had tried to balance the proponents of nontraditional education on the NAP with opponents or skeptics. Given the program focused research which the Center had previously undertaken and the allegiances with program personnel that grew out of that work, it is perfectly understandable that they would have hesitated to consider research strategies which might alienate program personnel or damage "fragile" non-traditional programs.

Another indication of CRDHE's program focused orientation early in their work was the choice Center staff made in structuring their

typology of nontraditional programs. The staff invested much of their time before the NAP meeting thinking carefully about program characteristics which they considered salient to the needs of nontraditional learners. Implicit in this approach to the construction of a typology was the belief that the most important questions an evaluation could address should deal with program characteristics, especially differences among programs. The characteristics of nontraditional postsecondary programs are the embodiment of the learning needs of nontraditional student populations. Thus a typology based in the characteristics of nontraditional programs was perceived as entailing a typology of nontraditional student populations based on learning needs. CRDHE's curiosity was centered on questions which would develop information about what kinds of programs work well and under what conditions, in the light of the "educational" needs of individual students. Although this is a clearly justifiable set of questions to which an evaluation may be addressed, it is not the only set of justifiable questions (as we will discuss in describing NIE's predispositions.)

The NAP reinforced CRDHE's concept of the questions that merited study. Approval of the Center's efforts to develop a program characteristic-based typology was voiced in the NAP meeting. The typology was seen as a new and insightful step in aiding those who desired to improve the nontraditional education programs, with which NAP members were associated, by helping them to learn from the experiences of other programs. NAP approval left the CRDHE staff with the impression that they were at least making progress in their definition of appropriate questions for evaluation.

In contrast, the panel's recommendations about how to proceed in defining and working with decisionmakers were mixed and contradictory.

No consensus of opinion was evident. The panel had been able to review the typology prepared for their meeting by the Center staff, and they responded out of an immediate sense that the typology was interesting and of value to them. But the panel had no similar prepared work on the decisionmaker question to review. Not being conversant with the scope of work described in the NIE contract, and probably not having given as much previous thought to issues of decisionmaking as to the issues which the typology addressed, the NAP simply had less of value to offer to CRDHE.

The Stanford Evaluation Consortium, acting out of a sense that the NAP had not been extraordinarily helpful to the Center regarding the definition of decisionmakers, and acting also out of a sense that the utilization of evaluation information was NIE's predominant question, suggested a procedural strategy to the Center for approaching the decisionmaker question. While the strategy suggested several specific points, its general thrust was to advocate intensive field involvement of Center personnel in states where decisions about nontraditional education seemed imminent. By interacting with individuals who were involved in the decision process in those states, the Consortium suggested that CRDHE could "map" the major issues and define the "key" decisionmakers. Based on this knowledge, it was argued, an evaluative process could be initiated which might result in more informed decisionmaking in those states and which might have proved instructive to decisionmakers interested in similar evaluation processes in other states.

After reflection, CRDHE incorporated a portion of the SEC suggestion, in that it limited the decisionmakers to be contacted, and decided to cluster the programs chosen in regions so that an investigation

of decisionmaking that went beyond individual institutions would be possible. However, major aspects of SEC's suggestions were rejected. By that point, time pressure was beginning to build, motivating the Center staff to get on with their tasks. They had already received strong approval from the NAP for the effort their typology represented. They were aware of, and concerned with the fragility of many nontraditional programs, and felt that SEC's emphasis on state level decisionmakers, if implemented, might damage them. But perhaps most importantly, the Center staff felt that they had worked hard and made progress. Their approach, albeit one of many possible approaches, was justifiable, and could build upon the expertise they had gained through previous experience. In the absence of negative feedback from NIE or the NAP about the course of work that had taken shape, it was logical and practical for them to continue.

The NIE Perspective:

Our analysis of CRDHE's predilection for particular definitions of "decisionmaker" and "appropriate questions to evaluate" is based upon far more evidence than is available for a similar reconstruction of NIE's predilection. In discussing the Institute in this regard we must rely upon reports of the dialogue which followed NIE's rejection of the Center's Interim Report. Through this dialogue some of NIE's previously undisclosed preferences emerged.

NIE was displeased with the program-characteristics approach of the Center's typology. Their need for a typology which would be oriented toward classifying nontraditional students who were defined as anyone not between the ages of 18-25 years and who had not entered a postsecondary educational

institution immediately upon completion of their secondary education. This implied a set of questions of concern to the Institute different from those of concern to CRDHE. The Institute staff was interested in information about how well various demographically defined population groups were being served by all postsecondary education programs. From their point of view, CRDHE's design would not produce information relevant to this key area. CRDHE had produced a matrix of programs and program characteristics which was based in a typology of the learning needs of nontraditional students. They failed in making the logic of this relationship explicit; consequently NIE found no evidence of a typology of nontraditional students.

The Institute's criticism of the Center design also indicated a concern with a different set of decisionmakers from the set of concern to the Center staff. Information about the services provided by nontraditional education to demographically defined populations is likely to be of interest to legislators or state and federal planners who are making broad funding policies about support for nontraditional and traditional education institutions. Administrators and managers of particular programs are likely to find data about nontraditional education which is aggregated across all, or even large number of programs, of little value to them. They would tend to be, as the Center staff anticipated, far more interested in the small class of programs with features similar to their own. The Institute's criticism of CRDHE's typology, then, can be viewed as revealing a predisposition on the part of NIE staff to prefer both a different set of evaluative questions, and a different set of decisionmakers, from those preferred by the Center staff.

Underlying Courses of Disagreement:

In the initial phases of the project there were no apparent disagreements as to the purpose of the evaluation or the anticipated methodology to be used in achieving that prupose. Both NIE and CRDHE were interested in designing an evaluation of aspects of postsecondary education; however, this agreement masked other disagreement. Both the proposal and the scope of work documents illustrate the use of the exact words and phrases by each agency in describing the project. What was hidden in this identical phraseology was that each agency used the same words to describe different conceptions of the project. Both wanted the evaluation to be "tailored" for the relevant decisionmakers, anticipating that this might increase the use of evaluative findings. Additionally, both were interested in a study that went beyond the collection of descriptive data. The disagreements which developed over the approach to the evaluation seemed to hinge upon different opinions as to what would be appropriate criteria for determining whether or not the project had been successful. Contradictory perceptions of the relevant audiences for this evaluation (with NIE, concerned for the most part with a national audience of educational and social policymakers and CRDHE concerned for the most part, with a national audience of nontraditional educators, program managers and directors) may account for many of the differences in the two institution's criteria for success. The same question; "How to design a user oriented evaluation of nontraditional postsecondary education?", when considered in anticipation of satisfying each of these two audiences, led to different methodological orientations.

We have tried to construct lists of criteria for success from both

CRDHE's and NIE's point of view. These are also lists of perceived purposes of the project, for if the project had satisfied the criteria for success it would have done so through the achievement of its intended purposes. These lists are of course highly interpretive, but the exercise of interpretation may prove illuminating.

In our opinion, CRDHE foresaw the evaluation as a means of expanding the body of knowledge concerning nontraditional education. The success of the evaluation would be measured in terms of:

(1) The provision of specific and useful information to individuals directly involved with nontraditional programs.

(2) The acceptance of the evaluation design within nontraditional postsecondary circles as a credible piece of research.

(3) The development of strategies that would communicate this new body of information to persons not directly related to nontraditional programs.

(4) The avoidance of actions which would pose threats for existing nontraditional programs.

(5) The development of a more sophisticated analytic scheme for assessing the outcomes of nontraditional education than previously existed.[2]

For CRDHE, if a trade-off had to be made between understanding how to increase the utilization of evaluative information, and getting better information about managing nontraditional programs, the balance would tip towards strengthening the assessment of nontraditional programs and not towards a general understanding of how to improve the utilization of evaluation research.

It is not easy to piece together NIE's point of view regarding the purpose of the project nor their criteria of success. It appears

to us that NIE's primary purpose was to fund an example of successful evaluation research. At various times this success was seen as being most strongly correlated with shedding some light on the perceived problem of undertuilization of evaluative information by legislators and key government executives. At other times success was thought to be best achieved by producing a rigorous, objective, substantive evaluation of nontraditional education. For NIE, satisfying the criteria for success involved a demonstration that:

(1) An evaluation can be undertaken in which decisionmakers play a significant role in shaping design.

(2) Information can be gathered which will support inferences about the relationships of various student, institutional, and external factors in postsecondary education, and which can lead to an overall assessment of how nontraditional students are being served.

(3) Such inferences can withstand informed review and criticism.

NIE's frame of reference was outside of the nontraditional educational world. When referring to the project's withstanding "informed review and criticism" the primary frame of reference was to critics from the realm of educational policymaking.

The differences between NIE and CRDHE could exist unrecognized as long as they both communicated in generalities. The same words could be used in dialogue without either group being aware of the other's implicit perspective, although both groups were intuitively uneasy about some aspect of the project. CRDHE had a sense of being forced to second-guess what it was that NIE really wanted. NIE had a sense of the project's getting "out of hand." Neither side took a strong initiative to seek unequivocal clarification of the other's interpretation of appropriate

project tasks. (CRDHE did attempt to clarify emerging disagreements during a visit to NIE the week of October 29, 1976.)

The generalities and ambiguities ended with the submission of the Interim Report, and the disagreements became apparent. NIE's major concern seemed based on their inability to envision how the study would allow them to make statements about the degree to which nontraditional postsecondary education was meeting the needs of populations underserved by traditional education programs. But concern was also expressed that the study appeared to be headed toward data analysis that "could be no more than descriptive." A failure to go beyond description was perceived by NIE staff as a lack of methodological rigor.

It is our view that the sources of disagreement between NIE and CRDHE are to be found in the insufficient precision in the task definitions from the outset of the project. The imprecision allowed both CRDHE and NIE to hold conflicting interpretations of what suitable activities might be. The conflict did not become apparent until the submission of the Interim Report to NIE. But by then, too much time and energy had been expended to redefine tasks and begin again. In our opinion, the issue of "methodological rigor" was a "red herring" which merely obscured the underlying sources of conflict. We do not believe that either the kind of design favored by NIE or the kind created by CRDHE would have resulted in evaluative findings that revealed causal relationships among types of nontraditional programs, types of learners, and types of educational outcomes. Recognizing an inability to establish causalities, the researcher attempts accurate description. And the production of accurate descriptive information is by no means a trivial or useless accomplishment. "Methodological rigor"

was a bogus issue. NIE and CRDHE differed in their opinions of what kind of descriptive information was preferable in the area of nontraditional education.

After NIE did respond to the Interim Report, and respond unfavorably, attempts to reconcile the differences were unsuccessful; consequently, a change of direction for the entire project occurred. Extensive dialogue, with each group trying to explain its position proved frustrating and futile. An eventual compromise redefining the scope of work to consist of three mini-projects was reached.

DOCUMENTING CHRONOLOGY FOR QUESTIONS 1, 2 and 3

(Editing note --- The chronologies (found on pages 24 to 43 and 55 to 62) are a combination of direct quotations, summarizing statements, and interpretations. The quotations are from documents prepared by either NIE or CRDHE. The summarizing and interpretive statements are based on the field notes alone or on a combination of field notes and prepared documents. Direct quotations are typed in script and referenced, while summaries and interpretations appear in standard type.)

(1) *CRDHE'S INITIAL POSITION: EVALUATION COMPONENT*

In order to delineate the first wave of tasks necessary for the successful completion of this project and assign staff CRDHE began by: *"clarifying and elaborating on the primary goals of the project"* (1). The conclusion reached was that the *". . .principal task is to develop a conceptual framework and procedural design for the evaluation of nontraditional degree programs. In so doing, we are to identify and incorporate into the design the information needs of a select number of decisionmakers in the field. It was further felt that whatever the outcome of the project after the nine-month planning period, the conceptual framework, instrumentation, and other component features of the design should be usable to nontraditional program directors and others interested in collecting evaluative data. In sum, our task is to design a "generic" model and scheme for the evaluation of nontraditional programs"* (2).

The flavor of this clarification was that CRDHE saw its purpose as providing an evaluation model with its primary utility being to the nontraditional program directors. The thrust of the project's contribution would be to the world of nontraditional education.

CRDHE was vitally concerned with the "compare and contrast" task in the proposal, recognizing that its completion would require considerable time and effort (3). In relation to this concern the first recorded methodological suggestion was *". . .to consider developing a series of alternative evaluation plans, each designed to accommodate the peculiarities of various kinds of programs, and structured so that component features of each plan might be tested as to the kind and utility of the information produced"* (4).

(2) *CRDHE'S INITIAL POSITION: DECISIONMAKERS' COMPONENT*

CRDHE began thinking about the decision making audience in terms of the entire educational world, i.e. where are the decisions made and who makes those decisions which affect any part of the nontraditional educational world? The selection of the National Advisory Panel and the reasoning behind that selection is reflective of that thinking:

"It was generally agreed that the NAP should be composed of persons with a broad understanding of the nontraditional study movement and who, at the same time, have ties to the various postsecondary education decisionmaking groups. Efforts were made to identify a range of individuals from state and federal government agencies, public and private institutions and multicampus systems, accrediting associations and continuing education groups. . ." (5).

By selecting persons with *"ties to various postsecondary education decisionmaking groups,"* (6) it can be inferred that the groups represented on the NAP are illustrative of those groups of decisionmakers whose input CRDHE considered as relevant to the evaluation design.

At these beginning stages an implicit assumption underlay the CRDHE approach, i.e., decisionmakers can specify the information they want. From the August 20th log:

"3. Conceptualization of a plan for continuous dialogue with decisionmaking audiences to;

a. identify desired evaluation information." (7)

"In so doing, we are to identify and incorporate into the design the information needs of a select number of decisionmakers in the field." (8)

". . .the failure of most evaluations to have any impact on decisionmakers and the decisionmaking process. This is partially attributable to difficulty in designing program outcomes and to the delay in getting evaluation information into the field when needed." (9).

Two working papers further explored the decisionmaker question. The first (#7, 8/26) directed the staff's thinking along the lines of the following questions:

(1) In what areas must decisions be made?
(2) At what level must decisions be made?
(3) Who enters directly into decision making?
(4) Who exerts indirect influence on decisions? (10)

The second working paper (#8) resulted in a matrix identifying seventeen groups, eg. faculty, state and federal government, communities with conceivable influence on eight aspects of a program, eg. initiation and development, target clientele, curriculum and content. (11)

Proceeding from the concepts developed in these papers the staff concluded:

"The conceptual scheme will focus on several aspects of the decisionmaking process in postsecondary education. It will:

(1) *Identify key decisionmaking levels*
(2) *Describe the relationship between institutional, state, federal, and other extrainstitutional decisionmaking*
(3) *Identify the kinds and ways in which information is communicated.*
(4) *Identify the agencies and communications networks active in information and policymaking within and between decisionmaking levels.*

This framework will assist in the identification and selection of decisionmakers to be contacted during the design of the evaluation study." (12)

(3) NARROWING THE EVALUATION FOCUS: THE FIRST STEPS

In order to accomplish any "compare and contrast" task it was necessary to develop a common categorizing system. Once nontraditional education was categorized its relevant features could be compared and contrasted with appropriate criteria. Towards this end CRDHE started searching for a mechanism to categorize nontraditional degree programs. It was hoped that the categorization system would reduce the variety of terms used to describe nontraditional education and still capture the richness of the programs. This categorization system or program typology would ". . .*be used in conjunction with the to-be-developed typology of nontraditional student populations, in the selection of degree programs to be contacted for inclusion in the evaluation design*" (13).

The decision was made to describe nontraditional programs in terms of the "*components*" which constitute an individual program. For example, the relatively inflexible class schedules in traditional degree programs have been barriers to potential learners. Thus, from CRDHE's point of view flexibility in scheduling would be an important component describing nontraditional programs. By asking learners in all programs to respond to items regarding the scheduling of classes it would be possible to discern trends, if they exist, of effective

scheduling strategies. The resulting matrix would be one of "scheduling strategy" plotted against "degree of satisfaction or efficacy." *"This strategy categorizing scheme would enable the evaluation to assist program administrators and other key decisionmakers concerned about the consequences of offering one set of alternatives over another in meeting the needs of targeted student populations."* (14)

A second scheme was discussed in which the initial categorization of programs would have been in terms of learner needs, *". . .typed along a continuum of responses to meet the specified needs."* (15)

It was intimated that the methodology will be as rigorous as the needs of the decisionmakers and the state of the data will tolerate. *"It is intended that the evaluation design be both substantive and procedural -- substantive in the sense that it can measure how well the educational needs of non-traditional students are being met by these programs, and procedural in that the information collected during the evaluation is sufficiently well-defined to be useful to program administrators and other decisionmakers."* (16)

". . .Development of the actual research design, instrumentation, and methodology will proceed apace with the activities outlined above and will depend to a large extent on the kinds of evaluation and information needs identified and refined. . .in the field." (17)

In this abstract CRDHE reiterated its intent that, *"the primary focus of the research will be on nontraditional students and how well they are served by the postsecondary programs included in the evaluation."* (18)

Further work on the typology of nontraditional students/programs created a rationale for this, *"building-block typology where combinations of student needs can be met by combinations of program components,"* (19). The rationale found in the first and subsequent drafts of working paper #18, (9/7) outlined the virtues and weaknesses of several ways of classifying the nontraditional student population, i.e., the adult parttime learner.

In our observations the thinking of CRDHE staff employed the following logic: A potential user of nontraditional postsecondary education is defined as any learner excluded from traditional postsecondary education. It is natural to think of these learners in terms of their most easily distinguishable characteristics, i.e., demographic characteristics. But although distinction among learners based on demographic characteristics may be helpful from a social perspective (in the sense that it readily identifies social groups considered to be "needy"), it has two disadvantages from the educational perspective:

(1) It states the problem in terms beyond the control of education. An educational program cannot alter the learner's

age, ethnic background, or certain life roles, and (2) From the point of view of educators trying to meet learner needs, a categorization of learners along traditional demographic lines, (age, sex, race, etc.) is not very useful. Within each category would be learners whose educational needs would be very different and such categories would not include all types of nontraditional learners.

Further thought reveals a system for categorizing learners which avoids these disadvantages. This new system defines learners in terms of the barriers which have kept them from attending traditional programs. (Within the populations defined by barriers to traditional education, representatives of "needy" populations will be found).

Defining learners in terms of barriers has planning implications for managers and designers of nontraditional institutions. It suggests that learner problems can be controlled by devising nontraditional programs for each learner's category, which surmount the barrier(s) defining that category, barriers which learners within that category share. In addition, the category system would include all learners who had been attracted to nontraditional education.

In CRDHE's thinking, the question to be answered was: How well is nontraditional postsecondary education meeting the learning needs not met by traditional education? The question was not: How well are certain socially "needy" populations (identified by demographic characteristics) being served by a segment of postsecondary education? An evaluation of nontraditional and traditional postsecondary education would be needed to answer the latter question.

(4) *NARROWING THE DECISIONMAKER FOCUS: THE FIRST CLUES*

The bulk of the work between 8/30 and 9/3 focused on "gearing up to collect information on decisionmaker evaluation needs." (2) The input of working paper #9 which detailed decisionmaking bodies with their respective areas of responsibility, influence, and communication/information networks illustrated the complexity and enormity of any attempt to tease out the various levels of decision making responsibility and roles. To narrow the decision making world a bit CRDHE *". . .agreed that for any scheme which was developed, decision making would be defined in terms of their impact on the ability of non-traditional programs to deliver educational services. In this way, the conceptual scheme finally adopted would be linked to the program and student typologies now in development."* (21) This was the first step taken in delineating the wide range of alternative definitions of "decisionmaker."

Proceeding from the background of these working papers plus a summary of the TEAM Associates work and an additional working paper outlining feasible communication mechanisms, eg. interviews, questionnaires, seminars, the staff sensed that the decisionmaker conceptualization was still too vague and ambiguous to provide any clear directions.

A strategy which could be utilized to focus the conceptualization was proposed. A structured telephone interview of a small sample of decisionmakers as they were then defined was suggested. The interview would be structured to elicit disalogue concerning a specific decision known to the interviewee thus avoiding the global information received from non-structured interviews. A decision regarding the implementation of the plan was to wait until the 9/13 meeting when "a draft of a comprehensive collection plan will be prepared . . .and discussed." (22)

A sentence in working paper #20 and updated in working paper #22 ("*Information collecting strategies: This will be discussed further in the Advisory Panel Meeting, and is an area where we will rely heavily on members of the Panel for advice and direction,*" (23)) without further mention of contacts with specific decisionmakers, suggests that direct communication with any decisionmaker will wait until after the NAP meeting allowing CRDHE to avail itself of the advice of that panel.

Before 9/13 the staff had developed an ". . .*outline detailing the project's objectives with respect to future contacts with decisionmakers and decisionmaking groups in postsecondary education.*" (24) The outline was viewed as a means of eliciting assistance from the NAP in "*identifying major decisionmakers and decisionmaking groups, and determining strategies for contacting and eliciting information from them.*" (25)

(4.) *Decisionmakers linked to degree programs for adults*

The second week in September also produced a clarification of the terms; audience user groups, and decisionmakers. Quoting from the CRDHE log of 9/14/76:

Audience, user groups, decisionmakers. Each of these terms are used somewhat interchangeably in both the NIE Work Statement and CRDHE proposal, referring to the groups or individuals who should be involved in the design. Recognizing that decisionmaking is not a "clean" process, we have decided to concentrate our attention on decisionmaker and decisionmaking groups in postsecondary education which have responsibility for initiating, planning, or implementing degree programs for adults. (26)

At this time the decisionmaking world still included the following groups of people:

1. At the state level, higher education coordinating bodies, legislators and their staff, budget and planning offices, legislative analysts, and manpower development agencies.

2. At the federal level, agencies of Office of Education in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Housing and Urban Development, National Institute of Education, Defense Education, staff of the White House special task forces, Federal Interagency Council in Education, Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

3. National groups associated with postsecondary education such as Educational Testing Service, College Entrance Examination Board, American College Testing, 1 Dupont Circle group, Council of Postsecondary Accrediting, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning.

4. Institutions and programs, eg. the National Science Foundation.

5. Large commercial consumers of educational services, eg. IBM and Xerox.

6. Independent "information/referral" agencies.

7. Educational foundations. (27)

(4.2) *Different communication strategies for different decisionmakers*

A more specific outline of CRDHE's thinking about decisionmakers is explicated in working paper #26. Previous to this working paper there had been a list of relevant decisionmakers and a list of considered communication strategies. Working paper #26 matches type of decisionmaker to the communication strategy seen to be most appropriate for eliciting information from that group. Thus federal and state officials would be contacted through seminars with targeted groups/persons being approached through a telephone survey; a second telephone survey would be used to contact institutions and programs; and professional association input would be available through the upcoming meeting and conventions. (28)

(5) *THE NATIONAL ADVISORY PANEL*

On 9/23 the NAP met in Berkeley. They were asked to respond to the following questions:

(1) Will the typology (of nontraditional education) provide useful information categories for decisionmakers?

(2) Have we identified those individuals and groups which have impact on decisions regarding intiating, planning, and operating degree programs for adults? Who or what groups have we missed?

(3) Who from these decisionmakers have or will have a major impact on policymaking in the area of degree education for adults, and should therefore be placed on a priority list of persons or groups to be contacted by project staff?

(4) What are the most effective strategies for contacting decisionmakers to discuss how and what kinds of information collected in an evaluation study would be most useful to them? (29)

During this meeting the NIE project officer expressed concern that the complexity of the project would get out of hand and stressed the need to focus the decisionmaker on the utilization of evaluation questions quickly. NIE's strongest interest in the utilization of evaluations was expressed. Part of this interest was expressed directly and part indirectly through the ratio of comments mentioning the utilization of evaluations to comments mentioning the evaluation of nontraditional education. (30)

(5.1) *The Typology*

During the NAP meeting: (1) Concern was expressed that the typology was descriptive of inputs but not of outcomes and that a realistic evaluation could not be built without describing outcomes; (2) That the context of the community milieu and institutional ability was not obvious; and (3) CRDHE received considerable praise for describing the nontraditional world with concepts founded in learning and not bounded by demographic characteristics.

Again the idea was reinforced that the first step in being able to compare nontraditional programs with other nontraditional programs was to describe all programs in common terms. Once the programs were described using a common set of descriptors, it would be possible to choose a representative sample of the programs. Only after selecting this sample of programs could CRDHE proceed to contact the relevant decisionmakers or to design instruments.

(5.2) *The Decisionmaker*

The NAP established no clear direction for either limiting the decisionmaking world or for communicating with members of that world. CRDHE recognized this lack and reflected on it in the log statement of 9/27: "Members of the National Advisory Panel appeared to be perplexed about the objectives of the project in contacting decisionmakers." Still the CRDHE staff sensed that the NAP encouraged them to "focus. . .attention of specific categories of decisionmakers, if for no other reason than time and energy constraints would limit what the staff could do." (31)

(5.3) *Communication strategies*

The NAP also offered some conflicting procedural suggestions:

1. Look at a specific decision, eg. the building of a nontraditional nursing program and then follow its progress through various channels from conception to implementation.

2. Contact persons in the overarching national groups and ask them for references to specific persons/groups who are influential in this area.

3. Concentrate at the state level, esp. towards those persons who have been involved in an innovation of any kind, eg. 1202's, representatives of system-wide administration.

4. Utilize the federal system and level of decision making.

5. Decisions about nontraditional education are related to the decisionmaker's attitude about nontraditional education. Survey their attitudes and look for a relationship between attitude sets and specific decisions.

6. Ask the administrators of nontraditional programs what kind of questions they have been asked for, for which they were not prepared.

7. Distribute survey instruments at professional meetings.

8. Select people who have been successful decisionmakers in this area and enlist their aid in constructing the design.

9. Work with the skeptics of nontraditional education and proceed to discover what questions they have.

10. Include a great deal of implementation information (i.e., how did CRDHE get the decisionmakers to participate and what strategies were successful and which ones were not?)

This type of information will be much more useful five years from now than specific content will be.

11. Send out the program typology and request responses to it in terms of the decisionmakers specific program of interest, i.e., what information do you need about each of these areas?

12. Study cases of decisions regarding nontraditional education. (32)

(6) *NIE's Statement*

The comments of the NIE project officer in the afternoon of the NAP meeting were directed towards the relationship of this project to the area of evaluation, explaining that through using the content area of nontraditional education, NIE was interested in testing out the hypothesis proposed by the TEAM Associates reports; namely that the utility/impact of an evaluation is related to the investment of input of the decisionmaker relevant to the program being evaluated. The Stanford observors inferred from these comments that the evaluation of nontraditional education was serving primarily as a vehicle to further the knowledge of key variables affecting the utilization of evaluation research. (33)

On the following day (9/24), in a dialogue between the NIE project officer and the Stanford Evaluation Consortium staff, the project officer stated that he had expressed a concern to one of the CRDHE staff that the project had to be more than, *"mere description," expecting "some design which would at least be correlational in nature."* (34)

A staff member of SEC stated that there were two facets to the project;

"nontraditional education and evaluation. It is sensed that CRDHE will give more emphasis to the nontraditional aspect while NIE is more concerned with the evaluation aspect." (34a) The NIE project officer made no comment.

(7) *A SUGGESTED STRATEGY*

Part of the SEC task was to consider ways of assessing the impact of evaluations. It was anticipated that there would be a relationship between the CRDHE work on the utilization of evaluations by decisionmakers and the SEC work on the assessment of the impact of evaluations. Previous discussion had indicated that at least a portion of the field work might be conducted simultaneously. The conceptual and practical link between the two groups, coupled with the SEC thought that the *"NAP had not been extraordinarily helpful in delineating the decisionmakers problem"* (35) led SEC to travel to CRDHE and suggest a strategy for developing the decisionmaker aspect of the design.

SEC thought that a research strategy based on a consulting model in which the researchers would be actively engaged assisting with the solution of a problem being studied by others, could lead CRDHE to generalizations that would be extraordinarily difficult to ferret out through the use of surveys and interviews. The methodology suggestion was made on the rationale that *"a strong treatment and a well-defined sample lends itself to an analysis of impact far more than a more diffuse treatment and sample."* (36)

In essence SEC suggested a strategy for developing the decision making aspect of the design. This suggestion had several features that:

1. CRDHE limit itself to looking at 2 or 3 states actively considering nontraditional education decisions.

2. CRDHE offer itself as a consultant to those states in framing an evaluation of nontraditional education.

3. CRDHE then "pull back" and assess the similarities and dissimilarities of the decision making process across states and decisionmakers which were disdovered through the consulting activities.

4. Through this process the developing evaluation would become responsive to supporters, skeptics, and critics of nontraditional education.

The consulting style of methodology limited to two or three states was suggested as a mechanism for incorporating the decisionmaker and later assessing the impact of the eventual evaluation. It would also follow one of the NAP members suggestion of producing a process-type product rather than a prescriptive-type product.

The strategy was viewed as infeasible by CRDHE because it would dilute the nontraditional education focus, primarily due to:

1. Excluding the federal and institutional level of decision making by assuming that decisions are made at the state level.

2. Excluding private institutions.

3. Being too risky to the individual programs and not providing easy data access.

4. Excluding UMA as it encompasses several states and part of the NIE request was to look at UMA.

5. Shifting the focus away from specific programs and obscuring the essential sutdent-focus of nontraditional education. (37)

Further discussion among the CRDHE staff led them to incorporating some aspects of the SEC suggestion. The following explains their thinking:

> *In our discussion with the Stanford team, it was pointed out that this strategy could substantially change the focus of the project away from degree programs to more global, non-program-specific decisions and concerns of state officials. This strategy would have prevented us from using the student and program typology in the selection of programs, and, more importantly, as an analytic framework for evaluating program performance. Additionally, this strategy would have effectively eliminated including programs sponsored by private institutions in the design.*
>
> *An alternate strategy was discussed which would allow the project to focus its attention on selected nontraditional programs and at the same time better define those decisionmakers to be included in the design. In brief, the project staff would select a number of nontraditional programs to be included in the evaluation on the basis of criteria identified through the typology. Those programs would be ones in which any important decisions or set of decisions is imminent in the near future. For each program, the staff would delineate those decisionmakers involved in the decisions to be made and during the design phase would work with these persons in developing an evaluation plan as it related to that program.*
>
> *In most cases, the staff would be working with program personnel, institution and state officials, and officers of state government. However, in some cases the constellation of decisionmakers for a particular program might also include federal agencies, the military, corporations, or other groups receiving service from the program.*
>
> *. . . In sum, this strategy would allow the project to keep its focus on program performance, define a specific decision making audience, and because of the relationship between the information to be collected and specific decisions to be made would engender the close cooperation of these groups in the study.* (38)

(8) *SOME CRUCIAL CONFUSION*

CRDHE recognized that if a process-based methodology were to be utilized one would run the risk of not providing NIE with specific advice and conclusions about specific programs, eg. UMA and follow-up data on the NSF programs. But if a product was the goal, then one could not follow through on an in-depth study of the process of decisionmaking because of practical constraints. There were several statements reflecting a need for NIE to be more specific about what what it wanted as an end product.

> *"NIE's objectives are not clear. . .prescriptive data?*
> *". . .agree that NIE is not clear on its agenda.*
> *". . .how will it (SEC suggestion) allow data to be collected on UMA which seems to be a NIE agenda item?*
> *"NIE seems to have some concerns about the decision-maker focus taking a backseat but have no way of directing their focus."* (39)

CRDHE did not press NIE for clarification at this time. From NIE's perspective they assumed that there was no need for clarification if CRDHE was not asking questions.

(9) *FROM NIE*

A memo from the NIE project officer reinforced the notion that NIE's purpose for letting the contract was to further, *". . .better utilization of evaluation research (which is) a continuing interest in the Division."* (40) Further along the statement is made that NIE had *". . .in mind both higher education and evaluation research themes."* (41) And yet further an expression of, *". . .NIE's wish to capitalize on the previously acquired Medsker data, the finding and nature of the TEAM reports describing evaluation research usage and information needs in higher education"* (42) And again there was *". . .some anxiety about the complexity of the project, particularly about the difficulty of identifying "users" and "decisionmakers" in ways which would support the research hypothesis about utilization of evaluation information."* (43)

The project officer questioned,

> *". . .the generalizability of the (SEC) strategy, seeing it. . .as case studies and not providing a basis for inferences."* (44)

NIE's definition of "success" was also detailed in this memo. "Success" was defined as insuring that:

(1) Logistical and other feasibility aspects of the project can be met.

(2) Data can be subjected to more than merely descriptive treatment, i.e., will be inferential.

(3) Such inferences can withstand informed review and criticism particularly with respect to alternative explanations of them which might be offered. (45)

The project officer also expressed concern about the state of some aspects of the CRDHE work:

(1) Demographic characteristics were "*excessively eschewed.*"

(2) The typology did not devote enough attention to community pressures. But in general the typology was viewed favorably.

(3) The decisionmaker strategies were perceived as being practically impossible. The project officer saw no priorities being established by the NAP and envisioned developing a methodology which would; narrow the decisionmaker field; allow for collection of more in-depth information; focus on the value systems of the decisionmaker; and catalogue decisionmakers relevant to contexts, levels, and subject. (46)

Also in this memo the project officer responded to the previous SEC question about the priorities of: (1) evaluating nontraditional education, or (2) increasing the utility of evaluation research. It was stated that neither the evaluation nor the nontraditional education focus could answer NIE's questions -- both were vital and must be given equal weight. This statement was inconsistent with the "necessary and sufficient conditions" discussion which immediately followed in the same memo.

The "*sufficient condition*" for labeling the project a success would be an objective, experimentally designed test of the hypothesis that it is possible to increase the utility of evaluation research by incorporating the decisionmaker in the design phase.

A "*necessary but not sufficient condition*" leading to the project's being labeled a success would be the design of a "*substantive evaluation focused on higher education programs for nontraditional learning populations.*" (47)

(10) TIGHTENING THE LINK BETWEEN STUDYING EVALUATION AND STUDYING NONTRADITIONAL EDUCATION

The program typology provided a mechanism for categorizing the delivery of nontraditional education. It was also viewed as a first mechanism for contacting decisionmakers. After selecting the programs to participate in the design phase CRDHE would look for those programs in which a decision was *"imminent in the near future."* (48) CRDHE would begin by contacting the decisionmakers at the program level and *"working upwards to include decisionmakers at any higher level which influences the program."* (49) The selected CRDHE strategy for contacting the narrowed field of decisionmakers had several steps:

(1) Choose programs to participate in the design phase through use of student/program typology insuring a representative sample of the nontraditional education world.

(2) Assess the state current or upcoming program-related decisions within these chosen programs.

(3) Type those decisions utilizing the CRDHE conceptualization of decisions and decisionmakers.

(4) Choose a subset of those programs with imminent decisions and study those program decisions in depth.

(5) Work with these programs and their decisionmakers using their input to mold the design to their needs.

Then the questions were asked: How would a decision be recognized? On what basis can decisions be categorized so we will know whether the decisions in Program A are similar or dissimilar to those in Program B? The first attempt to answer these questions was a paper utilizing and expanding on Stufflebeam's work on decisions. (A working copy of this paper was distributed on 10/11/76). (50)

After reading and discussing the paper the CRDHE staff wondered whether or not it would be useful to categorize programs according to the type of decision facing each one ("dimensions of a decision" was a phrase used). If such a categorization were possible then the eventual two-year study would include a minimum of two programs facing a type-A

decision and two programs facing a type-B decision continuing until the salient decision-types had been included. One of each decision-type program could be placed in the experimental group (programs whose decision-makers had been consulted in the design) or in the control group (programs whose decisionmakers had not been consulted).

No resolution was reached at this meeting and the unfolding of the rest of the project's pushed the need for any resolution to the background.

(11) *UTILIZATION OF EVALUATION MOVES INTO THE BACKGROUND*

In the second week of October the CRDHE staff turned its full attention to the tasks it perceived as being required for the November 1 interim report, i.e., the selection of institutions to be requested to participate in the design.

As the decisionmaker focus could not be finally determined until the programs to be studied were chosen, the decisionmaker question was moved into the background. Work continued on the paper ". . .*conceptualizing the relationship between decision-making, information, and evaluation.*" (51) A draft of this paper was presented to CRDHE staff on 10/29 with no further action being taken on this date. The paper is also referred to as being in progress in the November 2 Administrative Report to NIE.

Concerns were raised by CRDHE staff in the middle of October about whether or not there would be enough information about the structure of specific programs to allow them to be categorized with the typology. If they could not be categorized, then it would be impossible to know if the total program pool was representative of the nontraditional world. Staff traveled to the Office of New Degree Programs for the purpose of collecting more information about the programs being considered --- which would allow them to be categorized.

The use of the typology was tested by describing the NSF study programs in its terminology. Upon completion there was a sense of its having been useful. Programs did fit the categories, with some programs showing strength in some components, and other programs showing strength in other components. Some difficulty was anticipated in identifying programs with characteristics not found in the NSF programs. (52)

CRDHE viewed the process of selecting the institutions to be consulted in the design as a cooperative, collegial task to be conducted with NIE. Towards this end the initial pool of institutions and their characteristics classified

according to the typology was sent to NIE. It was expected that with NIE's consensus on the pool of programs, CRDHE could contact all programs in the pool to determine: (1) Agreement to participate, and (2) Status regarding any foreseen decision. The final step in the process would be to search for those programs which would fill in the gaps in the sample which would be needed to maintain representativeness.

(12) *CRDHE IN WASHINGTON*

Two CRDHE staff members met in Washington with NIE staff. NIE made no comment about the proposed format of the Interim Report. CRDHE was encouraged to not limit the decisionmakers to the program-related individuals which seems a bit contrary to the earlier advice to narrow the decisionmakers. There was also a suggestion that CRDHE ". . .*needed to balance its concerns regarding how the evaluation study was to be evaluated with the objective of designing an evaluation plan which will enable us to prepare information which would be useful to a wide range of decisionmakers.*" (53) It also commented that UMA should be included unless there were outstanding reasons that it should be excluded.

(13) *BACK TO THE INTERIM REPORT*

Between 11/1/76 and 11/19/76 there were no methodological issues discussed as the practicalities of getting the Interim Report prepared and mailed absorbed the available time.

Part of this preparation included a debate about which institutions were to be initially approached for inclusion in the design. Several programs from the NSF study had comparable program/learner profiles and of this group, it was debated which ones should be given a high priority for being consulted in the design phase and on what criteria.

(14) *INTERIM REPORT SENT -- RETURN TO DECISIONMAKING FOCUS*

With the Interim Report now off to NIE (sent 11/18), the staff turned its attention to the decisionmaker focus in an attempt to formalize its methodologies and to formalize the process of contacting the institutions and requesting cooperaton, eg.:

. . .working on interview schedules

. . .outlining issues which must be resolved within the decisionmaker question before the design can proceed

. . .writing the draft of the explanatory letter which will go to the institutions

. . .discussing further the conceptualization of the decisionmakers. There were no recorded decisions.

(15) *DECEMBER TURMOIL*

The NIE project officer met with the CRDHE staff in Berkeley 12/2/76 to discuss NIE's nonacceptance of the Interim Report. The report was considered unsatisfactory because:

(1) *it was unclear regarding the connection between student populations and programs*

(2) *the logic of CRDHE's thinking about student needs and programs was missing*

(3) *the criteria used for selection of programs was not explicit.* (54)

At this meeting it became apparent that the CRDHE and NIE were "miles apart" in their intentions. These conflicting intentions had remained shrouded in the ambiguity of contract/proposal dialogue. The Interim Report ended such ambiguity and forced both sides to explore their own stance and to confront the perceptions of the other actor.

Elaborations on NIE's concerns;

(1) NIE was concerned that by starting with learner needs and later aggregating the data in terms of populations would not provide large enough N's from which to draw conclusions.

(2) NIE was unable to discriminate among "programs" using the data in the Interim REport. The programs looked alike and there was no rationale for why some should be included while others should not.

(3) There was no evidence of cost-effective analysis methodology.

(4) An evaluation design should be understood by any person even those not familiar with the specific content focus of the evaluation, and this one had not been understood by the several people who read it at NIE.

(5) NIE proposed that CRDHE scan all nontraditional programs for the purpose of assessing the percentage of certain populations and then choose the program with the highest percentage of a given population.

(6) NIE wanted to be able to say that Program A is better than Program B for Population X. (55)

(16) THE AFTERMATH

12/6/76 CRDHE's next procedure was to think about responses to NIE's criticisms. For example, the task of rewriting the report to clear up confusion, to change directions, or to reorient the project was considered. There was still confusion as to whether NIE's concerns with generalizability were directed to the utilization of research questions or to the evaluative information about nontraditional education.

12/13/76 After meeting with NIE, CRDHE decided to attempt to take the typology and develop it according to NIE's expectations about student populations. This was to be completed by the mid-course review date which had been moved to the middle of January at CRDHE's request. (It was originally scheduled for the middle of February.) Additional discussion illuminated the first CRDHE perception that NIE expected a design which included:

(1) A complete cost-effectiveness study of the programs.

(2) The use of standardized measures of learning as outcome measures.

1/6/76 CRDHE attempted to test the feasibility of the NIE suggested student population approach utilizing the data available from the NSF study. By this time it had become clear to CRDHE that the time which had already been expended in conceptual discussions with NIE left an insufficient period remaining to complete the contract as originally described, by May 15. Following extensive dialogue between NIE and CRDHE the decision was reached that the original direction of the contract was to be refocused due to the impasse. Three smaller research projects provided the compromise between the original intentions and a complete dissolution of the contract.

The compromise resulting from these dialogues was to abandon the original intent of the project (philosophical differences and time limits being the reasons given) and to proceed with three miniprojects addressing the main foci of the intended design. One of these miniprojects was directed towards decisionmakers. The objectives of this miniproject were "to identify:

1. those persons who make decisions affecting nontraditional education and to determine the decision making process with regard to the development of programs and implementation of policies to serve nontraditional students.

2. the questions, policy issues, and pending decisions at various levels of decision making in the area of nontraditional degree education.

3. the information needs of decisionmakers in nontraditional education which might be responded to in an overall evaluation study and which may not be met by individual program evaluation studies." (56)

OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF QUESTION 4

(4) How did the interaction of CRDHE, the Institute, the National Advisory Panel to CRDHE, and the "third party" evaluator affect the attempted design of the evaluation?

This section of our report will examine the internal operating mechanisms of CRDHE in order to describe more fully the forces affecting the interaction between NIE and CRDHE. The close association of SEC and CRDHE provided a rich source of data, and a careful study of these data lends support for two explanations of the emergence of problems between NIE and CRDHE. Before detailing these two explanations, one caveat must be stated. A complete picture of the interaction is impossible, as data regarding the internal operating mechanisms of NIE were not obtained. Without such data our exploration of the forces present in the interaction is clearly limited.

As previously described, the interaction between NIE and the CRDHE became increasingly problematic. Our observation of internal CRDHE operations, in our view, support the following partial explanations of NIE-CRDHE problems: (1) The internal characteristics of CRDHE were such that they consumed the immediate time and energy of the CRDHE staff, leaving too few resources available to press NIE for clarification of the project. The lack of a clarification process prevented an earlier appearance of the conflict; (2) Once it became apparent that a basic conflict existed, each agency's fundamental operating style prevented resolution. An understanding of these two explanations is facilitated by using concepts drawn from the literature of organizational behavior.

There is a body of thought which describes an organization's

functioning by relating the nature of group structure to the nature of its operational style. Within this literature the structure of a specific organizational work group is analyzed in terms of the group's size, the degree of interdependence among tasks it is to perform, the degree of definition of tasks, and the spatial-physical barriers within its environment. The operational style of an organization is delineated through its source of authority, strategies of control, and style of communication.

While group functions become increasingly problematic as size, interdependence of work flow, absence of routines for the accomplishment of tasks, and spatial-physical barriers increase, such increases need not cause problems to emerge. The probability of emergent problems can be decreased in one of two ways. First, an increase in one of the structural factors which might be problematic can be balanced by a decrease in one of the other structural factors. For example, an absence of routines for the accomplishment of tasks can be offset by a decrease in the interdependence of tasks, Second, if structural factors cannot be adjusted to facilitate task performance, the operational style of the ogranization often will be. For example, lines of authority will become more hierarchical, control will become more explicit, and written communication rather than verbal communication will predominate.

Group Structure of CRDHE:

Academic research is characterized by a collegial model of organizational behavior. Characteristics of collegial behavior include authority based on expertise rather than hierarchy; control based on consensus rather than mandate; and informal means of communication.

CRDHE is both a product of and housed within academe; as might be expected, its operational style is collegial in nature. Because of this, the existence of a smoothly functioning work group was heavily dependent upon the achievement and maintenance of a balance of the above structural factors within the group. Due to a variety of circumstances, balance was not possible.

The following discussion will examine each structural factor separately. It should be remembered that the influence of no one of these factors can be labeled the cause of December's turmoil between NIE and CRDHE. Together these influences are like the pieces of a mosaic, revealing more assembled than any one viewed in isolation.

SIZE --- The smooth functioning of a group decreases as the group moves from small to large in size. A collegial, or informal structure of a work group relies on the use of face-to-face contact, and as the group grows larger, restrictions of time make such contact difficult. For example, individuals must share the allotted time for any given meeting. As the number of people who must share that time increases, individual's rates of participation decrease.

The CRDHE team was affected by the growth of a group from three to six active members within a month. While this number of persons should not be considered cumbersome in relative terms it was a 100% rate of growth. The original group of three had established productive working relationships. The addition of each new member required the beginning of a new relationship and an adjustment of previous relationships. The building of this network of relationships is vital to the functioning of any group, and it does slow work on tasks to some degree.

WORK FLOW --- As the degree of specialization of work increases, so does the interdependency of work flow. For example, if one of X's assignments cannot be completed until Y finishes a piece of work, then X faces the possibility of having his or her own work delayed. This uncertainty creates some strain in the relationship between X and Y. The simple existence of this uncertainty is enough to create additional stress for a group. The stress will exist even if the interdependence of work relations does not lead to delays. CRDHE's staff structure reflected both specialization and limited individual time commitment to the project.

Fullfillment of the NIE contract required special skills, and different persons on the CRDHE staff possessed these skills. For example, one person was skilled in manipulating massive amounts of data; two others had an intimate knowledge of nontraditional postsecondary education; a fourth contributed an understanding of field research and instrumentation in nontraditional education; a fifth person added a background of evaluation; and a sixth provided historical research skills. Consequently, when one aspect of the project tapped several of these areas of expertise, the work became interdependent. And as is the case in many organizations, the input of one person's specialization may be requested or mandated by several concurrent tasks.

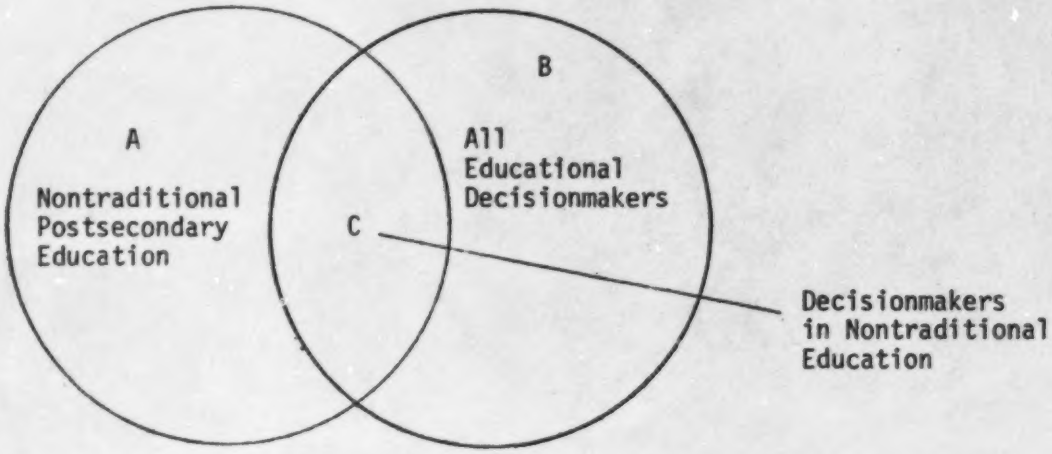
The problems of coordination created by specialization of function was compounded by the limited commitment of time from all but one member of the staff. One of the staff was assigned to the project on a fulltime basis while the other five staff members had other commitments. The timing of the NIE contract activities was affected by the timing of other staff commitments. This interdependence of staff members coupled with non-NIE

contract commitments added another dimension of stress to the group's functioning.

TASK DEFINITION --- The difficulty of a task increases as the task becomes decreasingly routinized. A routinized task has a clearly defined end, and a familiar way of reaching that end. The task becomes more difficult as the end-goal become less distinct and as established behaviors become less useful. Group stress increases as the task becomes more difficult. From the outset of the project the tasks faced by CRDHE were viewed as largely non-routinized. Nontraditional education, as a distinct area for study within the field of education, is still in its infancy. As such, it is not explicitly defined. The field is still wrestling with the specification of goals, expected learner outcomes, and methodologies appropriate to attain goals. The evaluation of postsecondary education serving nontraditional learners is a novel endeavor. There was some sentiment that certain research approaches would lead to dead-ends, but no one had mapped out the maze of alternative approaches and discovered any paths which were known to lead to the goals. Given this lack of clarity about both end-goals and paths to those goals, what would satisfy an expectation of "methodological rigor" in this field was not clear. CRDHE may have misjudged the difficulty of producing the products required by the contract within the time allotted. This could have been the result of CRDHE's unawareness of the amount of group work to be accomplished, complicated by the need for complicated synchronization of the staff's part-time schedules. An alternative explanation is that the length of time which existed between the receipt of the RFP in July, and the deadline for the submission of the proposal, prevented a detailed analysis of the time required to produce the list of products. As it was the December turmoil

so altered the timeline that it became virtually impossible to have the design process advanced far enough to allow CRDHE to utilize the spring professional meetings as a source of input from decisionmakers.

A lack of clarity about the nature of some of the products specified in the contract contributed to the level of stress at CRDHE. CRDHE was asked to design a study that would simultaneously address two vaguely defined research questions. It seemed that to approach one required that decisions be made which affected the other. The interlocked nature of the questions required CRDHE to proceed differently than they might otherwise have done. They had to consider what the results of an effort to define one question would have on the definition of the other. A Venn diagram may help to depict their dilemma. In referring to the diagram, Subset A represents nontraditional postsecondary education, Subset B represents all educational decisionmakers, and Subset C represents the decisionmakers in nontraditional education. The discussions between NIE and CRDHE focused on various aspects of the diagram.



Decisions about how to study Subset C could not be made in a way that would give equal emphasis to Subsets A and B. One had to lead and the other follow. If the understanding of Subset A was primary then the decisionmakers in Subset C were important because of their relationship to nontraditional postsecondary education. But if the understanding of Subset B was primary then Subset C became important because they were educational decisionmakers, their nontraditional educational orientation was not emphasized. In one instance decisionmaking is a vehicle for the study of nontraditional postsecondary education while in the other, nontraditional postsecondary education is a vehicle for the study of decision making in education.

CRDHE had expertise in the questions and the appropriate mtheodologies for the study of Subset A. It logically defined the question and the tasks in ways which emphasized the evaluation of nontraditional education. These decisions were not satisfactory from NIE's point of view. CRDHE's customary problem-solving behavior did not point to a resolution of NIE's "problem question." Any change from customary patterns of problem-solving adds to the stress level of a group. The stress created by a necessary change in customary responses to a problem can be offset by a highly stable and cohesive work group. The fact that CRDHE staff had not worked together long enough to establish such cohesion contributed to, rather than alleviated, the stress created by the changes.

SPATIAL-PHYSICAL --- Directly related to the cohesiveness of the CRDHE group and to its customary patterns of interaction was the increase in spatial-physical barriers. Spatial-physical barriers directly affect interaction patterns and the nature of the relationships which

develop. Physically moving individuals or groups apart or together exerts pressure on their interaction patterns.

During the initial discussion of this project, and the writing of the proposal, CRDHE was housed in a suite of offices in downtown Berkeley. It was not located on the University of California, Berkeley campus. Three out of the six staff members for the NIE project had offices in this building. Their offices were fairly close together and the floor plan of the suite allowed for informal and frequent interactions. The staff expressed the opinion that this type of interaction stimulated productive thinking.

A number of events resulted in the Center being moved to new housing on the U.C. Berkeley campus. The circumstances leading to the move detracted from the staff's sense of having a "place of their own." Additionally, the location of each person's office in relation to the other offices, and the small size of the offices (making office conferences unlikely) decreased the frequency of informal communication. Individuals reported an increase in the number of formal meetings, an arrangement found to be not as satisfactory as existed previously.

While the spatial-physical factor is not often highly influential, it can significantly amplify the effects of other factors.

Mediating Factors:

The previous pages have described the stress created by the influence of structural factors on a group's functioning. While these structural factors and their influences were largely beyond the control of the group, they demanded immediate attention. The group would not have been able to function without attending to them, but attending to

these influences used the time and energy that could have been used in seeking guidance and clarification from NIE.

Earlier clarification which focused on understanding the source of uneasiness being experienced by both groups could have led to an earlier recognition of the divergence between NIE and CRDHE. An earlier recognition of the different interpretations of the same words could have produced a different outcome for the project.

As noted earlier, the influence of the structural factors can be mediated by a formalization of authority, control and communication. The collegial organization of the academic seeting is not supportive of formalizing these systems. By contrast, NIE's mode of interaction with contractors seemed based more on formalized systems of authority, control and communication - a logical extension of the requirements of a formal contractual relationship.

In a collegial structure, decisions are only vaguely bound by the rules of the organization, and final decision making authority rests with a consenses of experts rather than solely upon the highest-ranked individual. A problem is recognized, and through the use of expertise an appropriate resolution is developed. A decision to implement the resolution occurs within the same group. The need for approval from a higher authority regarding decisions is an indication of a more formal authority system. CRDHE viewed the consensus of experts as legitimate authority while NIE operated from a contractual definition of legitimate authority. When conflict did occur, it was intensified by both NIE and CRDHE falling back upon arguments of which type of decisional authority was legitimate.

The tone of collegiality had been set by an earlier NIE project officer during a visit to Berkeley. CRDHE was left with the impression that NIE wanted some "help" in thinking through the questions of

evaluating nontraditional postsecondary education, and questions of whether or not the inclusion of decisionmakers in such an evaluation would increase the utilization of evaluation information. The formal definition of this "thinking-through" process would be handled in the usual RFP and proposal submission procedure. It is conceivable that at this time NIE and CRDHE shared a sense that the results of their interaction would be "movement towards" rather than "completion of" the products outlined in the contract. This style of an agreement could be allowed within a grant-financed study, but the legal constraints of a study financed through a contractual agreement demanded the completion of the products outlined in the agreement. It is unfortunate that this tacit agreement, if it in fact existed, was impossible to incorporate into the working agreement.

By the end of the summer of 1976 the project officer for the CRDHE contract had changed. The former project officer had left NIE for reasons unrelated to this project or to the internal mechanisms of NIE. The policy and tone of interaction as viewed by NIE did not change. The new project officer was working with the guidance of the NIE staff person who had been involved from the beginning of this project.

It appeared as if little did change, and CRDHE proceeded with the work, confident that they were proceeding in the right direction. The rejection of the Interim Report was a surprise. While CRDHE had had some concerns about their emphasis or lack of emphasis on some aspects of the report, there was no expectation that the work would be considered unacceptable. A meeting between NIE and CRDHE was set for December 2, to resolve the issues which had led to the rejection of the report.

The all-day meeting on December 2, 1976 can be caricatured by two statements:

(1) *From NIE to CRDHE*	"You didn't do what you were supposed to do."
(2) *From CRDHE to NIE*	"We did what we, as experts thought was right and expected."

Each statement reflects that particular agency's perspective of its legitimate authority. NIE believed it had final and authoritative decisionmaking power based on a formalized system of authority. CRDHE believed that decisions on the contested issues ought to rest with experts.

Also, the system of control mechanisms which determines the processes by which a group's work is evaluated and by which a group is reinforced in their performance came into play. CRDHE, unaware of the criteria with which NIE was going to evaluate their work, proceeded with the security engendered by their perception of NIE's earlier "do your best" tone. Their "best" did not meet NIE's expectations and NIE raised the termination of the contract as an option. While this "threat" was not considered "idle" by CRDHE, neither was CRDHE completely vulnerable to financial pressure. The prospect of accepting a role which might alienate a part of the postsecondary world was more threatening than a loss of financial support. CRDHE's refusal to be cowed by NIE's hard line was consistent with its academic rearing.

Other Factors:

As can be inferred from our analysis, the predominant interaction in this design project occurred between NIE and CRDHE. The National Advisory Panel and the Stanford Evaluation Consortium had minimal

influence on those interactions.

The National Advisory Panel's primary influence was in supporting CRDHE's conceptualization of the nontraditional world through a program/learner typology. As this advisory panel was composed of persons whose respect was desired by CRDHE, its support confirmed CRDHE's belief it had made appropriate decisions.

The Stanford Evaluation Consortium's interaction with CRDHE may have contributed to the overall difficulty of CRDHE's task. There was a lack of clarity as to how the data collected by SEC would be used by NIE. As always, in such situations, there was the premonition that SEC would be destructively critical. Because of this uncertainty, the frequent presence of the SEC staff member may have contributed to the group's stress.

DOCUMENTING CHRONOLOGY FOR QUESTION 4

(1) *PRIOR TO AUGUST 1976*

Early in 1975 persons at NIE were thinking about the need to evaluate the University of Mid-America (UMA). Evaluation as an area of study is an ongoing concern in the Finance and Productivity section of NIE and soon the dialogues about UMA were expanded to searching for a mechanism which would produce both an evaluation of UMA and contribute to the general knowledge about evaluations.

The histories of the staff at NIE led them to recognize that how to increase the utility of an evaluation was the pivotal question (as opposed to searching for how one completes an uncriticized evaluation).

By the fall of 1975 NIE had contracted for and received the TEAM, Inc. reports which were to provide some sense of the feasibility of including decisionmakers in the design of an evaluation. Additionally NIE had read the Medsker study sponsored by the National Science Foundation. The programs included in the Medsker study and in the TEAM work overlapped leading to NIE's contacting the Medsker study team at CRDHE. The initial discussions focused on the nature of the data stored on the NSF-Medsker study tapes. These September 1975 discussions were fruitful enough for NIE staff to draw up a draft of a possible RFP. In November 1975 two NIE staff members traveled to California to discuss this draft. They met with CRDHE staff on November 18, 1975 and with SEC staff on November 19, 1975.

The November 18, 1975 meeting between NIE and CRDHE (in Berkeley) was a lively intellectual discussion about the draft RFP. NIE staff recalls two main strands in that discussion: (1) How should populations be classified, eg. using broad, demographic characteristics or on the basis of learning needs? and (2) How to expand the range of types of programs to be explored? The programs in the NSF study were too similar to allow for any generalizable comparisons. (1)

CRDHE staff recalls that the tone of these meetings was that NIE wanted some assistance in thinking through these questions. They recall having heavily criticized the NIE draft RFP because of its reliance on demographic characteristics to describe the populations being served by nontraditional postsecondary educations. (2)

CRDHE was asked about their interest in carrying out a study as described by the NIE draft RFP. CRDHE responded with

a tentative "yes." Their hesitation was based on their not wanting to be involved with a study which would not go beyond the descriptive level of the NSF study and because of their reservations regarding NIE's conceptualization of the learning populations in nontraditional postsecondary education.

NIE left the draft RFP with CRDHE staff on November 18, 1976. CRDHE provided written feedback on the draft and returned it to NIE. (3)

NIE revised the proposal, sent out an RFP, and requested that CRDHE respond. The nature of the request was that of a sole-source contract based on the desire to build on the data available on the NSF study tapes and to capitalize on the institutional good will established by the CRDHE staff within the nontraditional postsecondary educational world. (4)

The amount of time which elapsed between the release of the final RFP and date for submission of the proposal is unclear. The CRDHE staff recalls the time as being short. (5) NIE staff recalls that there was sufficient time and that the deadlines had been extended as requested by CRDHE to allow the project director to be active participants in the writing of the proposal. (6) The proposal was written by the newly hired project director and three CRDHE staff members who had participated in the NSF study of nontraditional postsecondary education programs. The project director was attracted to this study because of its utility to the decisionmaker question. (7)

A preliminary proposal was submitted to NIE (file copy not dated). The preliminary proposal was modified to include the addition of an evaluation specialist to the staff (8) and to insert the words "cost-effectiveness" into the first objective of the study. (9)

The contract was signed with an effective date of August 17, 1976.

In August 1976, CRDHE and SEC met to discuss their separate contracts and how they might relate to each other. SEC was still in the process of writing their proposal. While there was some concern about the logistics of relating the two proposals, few problems were foreseen of a conceptual nature. There were some questions about why NIE wanted the information requested in the SEC proposal.

8/20/76 The evaluation specialist is hired. ". . .*has been invited to join the project as our evaluation specialist. Pending approval from the University and NIE, he will join the project on a half-time basis on September 1.*" (10)

On this date, SEC and CRDHE met for the second time. ". . .outlined the two-fold responsibility of the third-party evaluation as . . .sees it: (1) to document and chronologue the development of the CRDHE evaluation design, and (2) to prepare a plan for evaluating the impact of information collected through such an evaluation study if it were implemented. (11)

A considerable amount of time was spent discussion the relationship between the two projects. There was a general agreement that a close working relationship should be maintained between our projects and that both groups would benefit from an exchange of information and commentary. While no definite arrangements have been made, it was hoped that members of the CRDHE staff and the Stanford staff would be able to meet at least twice monthly, and that copies of all reports, logs, position papers, and the like could be freely made available to each group. Stanford project's principal investigator also indicated his hope that he and/or his assistant would be able to join our staff on several field visits. In order to minimize the risk of confusion in the field, members of the Stanford team would be introduced as persons working with CRDHE on evaluating the impact of the evaluative data collected. (12)

8/27/76 Efforts continued to contact and build the National Advisory Panel.

(2) SEPTEMBER 1976

Members of the National Advisory Panel had been selected by September 3. The first meeting had been set for September 23, 1976. A list of the Panel membership can be found in the appendix.

The CRDHE project director was contacted to participate in a conference on Lifelong Learning in the Public Interest (sponsored by the Coalition for Adult Education Organizations) in October.

The SEC proposal was submitted to NIE and a copy sent to CRDHE.

"(the CRDHE project director) has been asked to consult with the National University Extension Association on the planning of their upcoming national meeting." (13) She met with them during the week of 9/12 - 9/17, 1976 in Los Angeles.

The agenda and related materials for the NAP meeting were mailed by September 17, 1976.

The CRDHE project staff members met with a member of ". . .the Academic Affairs staff of the Illinois Board of Higher Education to acquaint him with the evaluation design project." (14)

A third CRDHE staff member eas contacted by staff from Far West Labs ". . .to discuss possible assistance by CRDHE staff in the review of a policy planning paper on introducting experiential

career education into two-year colleges. . ." (15)

9/23/76 The National Advisory Panel met in Berkeley. It was an all-day meeting. Members of the SEC staff attended the meeting, as did the new NIE project officer. A doctoral candidate in history became a research assistant to the CRDHE project, and as of this date began attending meetings. The tone of the meeting was that the research tasks needed to be done, but that this was a very difficult area to study. It was going to be difficult to develop a design that would meet the expectations of all involved.

9/24/76 The NIE project officer met with the SEC staff in Palo Alto. This was a general discussion of the early stages of the project. Again the concerns about the complexity and size of the project were expressed.

SEC suggested that all materials which circulated among NIE, CRDHE, and SEC be made available to all parties involved in the project. Some thoughts that SEC had about reducing the complexity of the project were broached with the NIE project officer. It was agreed that SEC should have no hesitation in presenting these thoughts to CRDHE. The NIE project officer decided to attend the meeting at which these ideas would be discussed.

The SEC principal investigator called CRDHE and arranged a meeting between the CRDHE staff and SEC staff for 9/28/76.

9/27/76 The NIE project officer met with other NIE staff after returning to Washington, D.C. The areas of concern expressed in that meeting were outlined in a memo to the file by one of the staff members. To paraphrase some of the memo's points:

"(1) The project's complexity is its most attractive feature. It is also its most dangerous one. . .

(2) CRDHE is serious about this project and has appropriate experience in many of the important areas but there is the sense that there is a need for a consultant or an associate to provide the skills necessary to design a regirous empirical study and to strengthen the critical analysis skills.

(3) Soon someone must select a group of decisionmakers from which to elicit questions of concern.

(4) Lack of clarity about CRDHE's understanding of the project's focus on nontraditional students within a range of programs versus nontraditional students within a range of nontraditional programs.

(5) *It (the project) is first an experiment in evaluation and only second is it a study of a specific population of students and programs in higher education."* (16)

The areas of concern were strong enough to prompt the NIE project officer to call CRDHE and suggest his availability for another meeting to further clarification. The CRDHE project director thought that the tasks were clear enough for them to proceed with their work and that another meeting at this time would not be productive. (17)

The decision was made that the NIE project officer would receive copies of all weekly logs written by CRDHE, *". . .felt this procedure to be one way of maintaining a close working relationship between the project and NIE."* (18)

9/28/76 A meeting occurred between SEC and CRDHE to discuss SEC's research strategy suggestion. The meeting moved from a presentation of the suggestion, to questions of concern and foreseen problems with the suggestion, and then to "what if...?" discussion indicating that CRDHE was trying the suggestion on for size.

The NIE project officer circulated a detailed memo describing his perceptions of the project from the discussion and events which had occurred while he was on the West Coast. This memo was introduced with the comment, *"As a matter of general practice, particularly for (the) benefit (of the previous project officer) I want to keep a record of our doings and sayings on such visits. While that isn't unusual, my experience has been that project officers don't always share the impressions they bring home with them. . .my basic intent is to share with you my impressions and conclusions that I will be discussing back here."* (19)

The use of a detailed memo such as this one was a unique strategy. The usual procedure in contract monitoring is for the project officer to write memos to the file but not to share those memos with the contracting agency. By sharing this memo NIE was attempting to keep the communication channels open. This was the only memo of this kind sent until December although contact between NIE and CRDHE was maintained by phone.

(3) *OCTOBER* The CRDHE project director was out of the country for the entire month of October, (until 10/27/76) and the following other staff members were traveling:

(1) One was to be out of town for four of the next five weeks.

(2) Two were to be in Princeton, Albany, and Washington the week of 10/18/76 working on the project.

Two staff members were working on basic papers for the project and remained in Berkeley.

SEC staff made four visits to the CRDHE --- now housed in Tolman Hall on the University of California, Berkeley campus. These visits included time spent in individual interviews, attending staff meetings, and a general discussion of how SEC foresaw the mechanics of completing Task I of its contract,, namely, the development of the history and chronologue.

10/8/76 Beginning work on the Interim Report to NIE, three CRDHE staff members met with Nancy Tapper, President of the Peralta College for Nontraditional Study. *"Principally our meeting was to bring us up-to-date on the activities of the College, which might be included in the design as one of the case study programs."* (20)

The 9/22/76 memo from the NIE project officer was circulated through the CRDHE staff with a discussion of it to precede a trip to the East Coast by two CRDHE staff members. The staff members would meet with the NIE project officer to discuss any reaction to the memo.

10/15/76 Three CRDHE staff members *". . .met with Donald Gerth, a member of our Advisory Panel and President of Dominguez Hills State University. This meeting was suggested by Don to review the development of the CSUC External Degree Program and system-wide consortium. . ."* (21)

10/26/76 Two CRDHE staff members met in Washington, D.C. with NIE staff. The dialogue was an attempt by both parties to clarify expectations and concerns as CRDHE prepared the Interim Report.

(4) NOVEMBER *"Because of. . .efforts to collect enough information to categorize a range of nontraditional programs we (CRDHE) will not be able to submit the Interim Report to the Institute on schedule by November 1. . .target date for completing the Interim Report is November 18."* (22)

11/4/76 Phone conversation between NIE and CRDHE discussing the Interim Report and the date of its expected arrival at NIE. (23)

11/9/76 Telephone dialogue between NIE and CRDHE focusing on general activities of the CRDHE staff and providing no additional information than the log covering this time period. (24)

11/16/76 Telephone dialogue between NIE and CRDHE which included a discussion of the pool of programs which will be included in the Interim Report (25)

11/18/76 Interim Report sent to NIE.

Tasks assigned for the next set of activities --- individual work was proceeding so that the 12/6/76 all-day meeting could be most productive. This meeting was scheduled to structure the work needed to study the decisionmaker question.

11/29/76 CRDHE still had not heard from NIE regarding the Interim Report.

11/30/76 The NIE project officer called CRDHE and said that there were some problems with the Interim Report and CRDHE urged him to come to California. A meeting was scheduled between the NIE project officer and CRDHE staff to discuss the problems.

(5) DECEMBER The NIE project officer explained why the Interim Report was found to be unacceptable. The meeting continued all day with a sense of frustration experienced by both NIE and CRDHE. The frustration seemed to be a matter of neither side "hearing" the other side's position. It is unclear as to what combination of personalities, philosophies, and substantive differences created the eventual outcomes.

Several alternative actions were presented to CRDHE by NIE: (1) Change the design, (2) More fully explain the current design and explain exactly how NIE will get the results that it wants, or (3) Terminate the contract.

It was decided that CRDHE would meet and discuss these alternatives, and then part of the CRDHE staff would meet with the NIE project officer in Washington, D.C. on 12/9/76 to discuss the alternative chosen.

12/6/76 A meeting of CRDHE staff occurred (plus the director of CRDHE), to discuss possible alternative actions to the rejection of the Interim Report. The discussion covered such issues as:

(1) What would be worthwhile to spend our (CRDHE) time doing?

(2) What are we and what are we not philosophically opposed to doing?

(3) What is the exact interpretation of the products required by the contract?

(4) What are NIE's reasons for conceptualizing the learning population on demographic characteristics?

(5) What can realistically be accomplished? (26)

The discussion resulted in several recommendations for action which were to be presented to NIE on 12/9/76. Two CRDHE staff members were to travel to Washington, D.C. for the 12/9/76 meeting.

12/9/76 — A phone call from Washington, D.C., to CRDHE, described the meeting as "a good one." NIE agreed to the "modified Plan A" (27) which allows CRDHE to test NIE's categorizing system utilizing NSF data. This work was to be coupled with a moved up midcourse assessment meeting which would include the NAP.

12/13/76 — The CRDHE staff met to accomplish the categorizing of students according to NIE's thinking, is using demographic characteristics. There was also some discussion of the concrete products called for in the contract especially the design for a cost-effectiveness analysis. (SEC was to send CRDHE a copy of a Consortium paper on this subject.)

12/29/76 — CRDHE staff was discouraged. Attempting to work with the NSF data in NIE's terms was virtually impossible --- the categories made no sense. They began to discuss the possibility that the entire design/evaluation question was premature, *". . .the whole study is premature given the desired scope expected and the art or science of the area."* (28)

The CRDHE project director was to call NIE and explain the above CRDHE conclusion to the NIE project officer, with their suggestion of what could be salvaged from a redirection of certain aspects of the contract.

(6) JANUARY 1977 — CRDHE staff were preparing a detailed memo to respond to NIE outlining the problems encountered in attempting to categorize populations in the manner requested by NIE.

They were also working on the agenda for the midcourse assessment meeting tentatively scheduled for January 17 or 18. (This is the accelerated date requested by CRDHE) On January 12 a letter went to the NAP outlining the progress of the project to date and requesting that they keep the originally scheduled meeting date of February 18, 1977 open.

The proposed agenda for the midcourse review and assessment meeting included the outline for three proposed "miniprojects" which would accomplish as much of the original intent of the contract as was perceived to be practically and philosophically possible.

1/3/77 — The CRDHE project director called NIE and talked to the project officer, who was unwilling to set a date for the midcourse assessment meeting until he had seen and reviewed the memos sent by CRDHE.

1/14/77 A letter from NIE to CRDHE acknowledged the receipt of the midcourse review report and made the following statements:

". . .do not believe that the design that you suggest will address the major concerns that we noted in the NIE work statement and that are incorporated in the Center's proposal."

". . .the initial purpose was to test the feasibility of constructing a design which would answer the major questions posed in the contract. It may very well be that you have discovered that the research in which we are interested cannot or should not be undertaken. If this turns out to be your final conclusion, we respect that and appreciate your integrity and candor."

"We look forward to hearing from you concerning the alternatives noted above and promise to get back to you at the earliest possible time after receiving the material. We concur with you that failing to come to agreement on some alternative course of action, termination of the contract should proceed." (29)

1/21/77 A copy of the proposed alternatives to the original contract were mailed to NIE, SEC, and a member of the NAP. A meeting between NIE and CRDHE was scheduled for January 27 to discuss these proposed alternatives. The alternatives were in the form of three miniprojects:

(1) Analysis of the response of nontraditional programs to nontraditional learners.

(2) Identification of decisionmakers and an analysis of their information needs.

(3) Preparation of instrument development specifications.

Before the scheduled January 27 meeting NIE called CRDHE and gave the "OK" for completion of the miniprojects and as there was no need for the meeting it was canceled.

Work proceeded on the miniprojects and SEC's relationship with CRDHE officially ended on 2/1/77.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

1. Medsker, L., Edelstein, S., Kreplin, H., Ruyle, J., Shea, J. Extending Opportunities for a college degree: Practices, problems, and potentials, Berkeley: Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, University of California, 1975.

Overview and Analysis of Questions 1, 2, and 3

1. CRDHE weekly log of September 7, 1976: p. 1
2. SEC observational notes of CRDHE staff meetings of September 28, October 11, and October 13, 1976.

Documenting Chronology for Questions 1, 2, and 3

1. CRDHE weekly log dated August 20, 1976: p. 2
2. August 20 log: p. 2
3. August 20 log: p. 1 and Observational notes of August 18, 1976
4. August 20 log: p. 3
5. August 20 log: p. 3
6. August 20 log: p. 3
7. August 20 log: p. 1
8. August 20 log: p. 2
9. August 20 log: p. 2
10. CRDHE working paper #7, "Decision Making --- Postsecondary Education," August 26, 1976.
11. CRDHE working paper #8, "Distribution of Policymaking Responsibility in Nontraditional Education Among Decisionmaking Groups in Postsecondary Education, August, 1976.
12. CRDHE weekly log dated August 27, 1976: pp. 2-3
13. August 27 log: p. 2
14. August 27 log: p. 2

15. August 27 log: p. 2

16. Abstract of the project, "Designing an Evaluation Plan for Nontraditional Degree Programs," August 27, 1976.

17. Abstract: p. 2

18. Abstract: p. 2

19. CRDHE weekly log dated September 14, 1976: p. 1

20. CRDHE weekly log dated September 7, 1976: p. 1

21. CRDHE weekly log dated September 7, 1976: p. 1

22. September 7 log: p. 2

23. CRDHE working paper #22, "Decisionmakers in Non-traditional Education: Information Needs and Communications Strategies." Revised Draft, September 13, 1976.

24. September 14 log: p. 1

25. CRDHE log dated September 14, 1976; p. 1

26. September 14, 1976 log: p. 2

27. CRDHE working paper #12, "Strategies for collecting information from decisionmakers," September 1, 1976.

28. CRDHE working paper #26, "Strategies/approaches to information collection," September 14, 1976.

29. Agenda prepared for the meeting of The National Advisory Panel (NAP), September 23, 1976.

30. Observational notes of NAP meeting collected by staff of Stanford Evaluation Consortium (SEC).

31. CRDHE log dated September 27, 1976: p. 2

32. Observational notes of NAP meeting (September 23, 1976) collected by staff of SEC.

33. Observational notes of NAP meeting collected by staff of SEC.

34. Observational notes of September 24, 1976 meeting between NIE and SEC.

34a. Observational notes of September 24, 1976 meeting between NIE and SEC.

35. Observational notes of September 28, 1976 meeting between CRDHE and SEC.

36. Observational notes of September 28, 1976 meeting between CRDHE and SEC.

37. Observational notes of September 28, 1976 meeting between CRDHE and SEC.

38. CRDHE weekly log dated October 4, 1976.

39. Observational notes of September 28, 1976 meeting between CRDHE and SEC.

40. Memo from NIE project officer sent to CRDHE and SEC dated September 28, 1976: p. 1

41. NIE memo dated September 28: p. 2

42. NIE memo dated September 28: p. 2

43. NIE memo dated September 28: p. 2

44. NIE memo dated September 28: p. 3

45. NIE memo dated September 28: p. 3

46. NIE memo dated September 28: pp. 3, 4

47. NIE memo dated September 28: p. 7

48. October 4 log: p. 2

49. October 4 log: p. 3

50. CRDHE working paper, "Decisionmaking and Educational Evaluation," October 11, 1976.

51. CRDHE weekly log dated October 12, 1976: p. 2

52. SEC observational notes of October 13, 1976, staff meeting at CRDHE.

53. CRDHE weekly log dated October 20, 1976: p. 6

54. SEC observational notes of December 2, 1976 meeting between NIE and CRDHE.

55. SEC observational notes of December 2 meeting between NIE and CRDHE.

56. "Mid-Course Review: Project to Design an Evaluation Plan for Nontraditional Degree Programs," January 12, 1977. See also: Memo from CRDHE to NIE dated January 21, 1977, "Proposal for discussion on January 27, 1977 --- Mini-project 2: Identification of Decisionmakers and an Analysis of Their Information Needs."

Documenting Chronology for Question 4

1. Field notes from visit to NIE, June 8-9, 1977.
2. Field notes from visit to CRHDE, October 1976.
3. These documents (draft RFP and response from CRDHE) were unavailable.
4. Field notes from visit to NIE, June 8-9, 1977.
5. Field notes from visit to CRDHE, October 1977.
6. Field notes from visit to NIE, June 8-9, 1977.
7. Interview with project director,
8. Field notes from visit to NIE, June 8-9, 1977.
9. Preliminary and final drafts of the CRDHE proposal "Development of a Plan for a Longitudinal Evaluation of Postsecondary Programs for Nontraditional Populations that is Directed Toward Selected Decisionmaker Audiences." from NIE files, p. 5
10. CRDHE weekly log dated August 20, 1976, p. 2
11. August 20 log: p. 4
12. August 20 log: p. 2
13. CRDHE weekly log dated September 14, 1976: p. 3
14. CRDHE weekly log dated September 20, 1976: p. 2
15. CRDHE log dated September 27, 1976: p. 2
16. Memo to NIE file "Berkeley-Reports", September 28, 1976.
17. Field notes from visit to NIE, June 8-9, 1977.
18. CRDHE weekly log dated September 27, 1976: p. 3
19. NIE memo to CRDHE and SEC of September 28, 1976.
20. CRDHE weekly log dated October 12, 1976: p. 2
21. CRDHE weekly log dated October 29, 1976: p. 4
22. CRDHE weekly log dated November 1, 1976: p. 1
23. Notes from NIE file, "Berkeley-Correspondence," November 4, 1976.
24. Ibid., November 9, 1976

25. Ibid., November 16, 1976

26. SEC observational notes of CRDHE staff meeting on December 6, 1976.

27. Telephone conversation between CRDHE staff and SEC staff on December 9, 1976.

28. SEC observational notes of CRDHE staff meeting on December 20, 1976.

29. Letter from NIE to CRDHE dated January 14, 1977: p. 1

APPENDIX A

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